

**Amendments to Claims:**

Please amend claims 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 15 as set forth below.

The listing will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

1. (Currently amended) An improved process for the preparation of gabalactam of formula 1

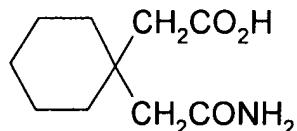


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which comprises

(i) preparing an aqueous solution of an alkali or alkaline earth metal hydroxide in a concentration ranging from 10 to 20% by weight, adding bromine to the resulting solution to give the appropriate alkali or alkaline earth metal hypobromite solution having a concentration ranging from 5 to 10% by weight ,

(ii) adding 1 part by weight of an amide of the formula 4



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to 7.5 to 9.5 parts by weight of the solution of the alkali[*A*] or alkaline earth metal hypobromite obtained in step (i) during a period in the range of 1 to 4 hours, at a temperature in the range of -10 to + 10 degrees C ,

(iii) keeping the resultant mixture for ageing aging in the temperature in the range of -10 to +10 degrees C for a period in the range of 0.5 to 2 hours,

(iv) heating the mixture gradually to a temperature in the range of 80 to 100 degrees C, for a period in the range of 3 to 8 hours and aging for 5 to 8 hours,

(v) cooling the reaction mixture to a temperature in the range of 30 to 50 degrees C,

(vi) extracting the mixture using a nonpolar solvent or a mixture thereof,

(vii) subjecting the resulting aqueous layer to the steps of (iv) to (vi) defined above,

(viii) combining the organic layers obtained in steps (vi) & (vii) together,

(ix) washing resulting combined organic layers with water at a temperature in the range of 30 to 35 degrees C, and

(x) distilling of the organic solvent at a temperature in the range of 60 to 110 degrees C, under reduced pressure.

2. (Previously presented) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein in step (i) the alkali metal hydroxide is sodium hydroxide.

3. (Currently amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein in step (i) the concentration of the alkali[/] or alkaline earth metal hydroxide solution is in a range from 10 to 15%.

4. (Previously presented) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the concentration of the hypobromite is in the range of 5 to 8 %.

5. (Previously presented) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the amount of hypobromite added is in the range of 8 to 9 parts of the solution of sodium hypobromite.

6. (Currently amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein in step (ii) the addition is performed during a period ranging from 1 to 3 hours.

7. (Currently amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein in step (ii) the temperature employed during the addition is maintained at -5 to +5 degrees C.

8. (Currently amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein in step (iii) the aging of the reaction mixture is performed at a temperature in the range of -5 to 0 degrees C for a period in the range of 0.5 to 1.5 hours.

9. (Currently amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein in step (iv)-(iii) the heating is performed at a temperature in the range of 80 to 90 degrees C.

10. (Previously presented) An improved process as claimed in claim 9 wherein the heating is performed during a period of 4 to 6 hours.

11. (Previously presented) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the cooling is performed to a temperature in the range of 35 to 45 degrees C.

12. (Previously presented) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the extraction is done using an aliphatic or aromatic nonpolar solvent such as ethylene dichloride, methylene dichloride, hexane and toluene.

13. (Previously presented) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the aqueous layer is once again heated to a temperature in the range of 80 to 100 degrees C during a period of 3 to 8 hours, aged for 5 to 8 hours, cooled and re-extracted with toluene.

14. (Previously presented) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the combined organic layers is treated with charcoal for removing any coloring matter present in it.

15. (Currently amended) An improved process as claimed in claim 1 wherein the distilling of the organic-nonpolar solvent is done between 60 to 90 degrees C under reduced pressure.